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France and the Kafkaesque politics of the European Defence Community¹

According to the conventional wisdom of many Europeans and non-Europeans alike, European integration experienced a sort of arcadia in the early 1950s: European governments, especially that of France, were ready to create a federation – a kind of United States of Europe – which would dilute the unilateral power of nations in a federal whole and bring ancient rivalries to an end. To many people the creation of a federal state still constitutes the real target of the European project – either its great hope or its great fear. This target was acknowledged in the Schuman Declaration on 9 May 1950 in Paris, in which Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister, declared that putting Franco-German coal and steel production under a common authority was the first step towards a European federation.² What I seek to explain here is that such an opportunity never really existed, because although it made use of the idea of the federation in order to win indispensable backing for its projects from the United States, the construction of a federal Europe was never on the agenda of the French government.

The United States' diagnosis of the causes of the unremitting conflicts in Europe highlighted the weaknesses of the continent's overall political and, hence, economic organisation. Europe constituted a mosaic of small countries, each fiercely protective of its national sovereignty, in a permanent state of rivalry with the others, and in constant competition for resources which – to the U.S.'s way of thinking – should be common and managed for the benefit of all. This rivalry and competition was identified as being responsible for the state of recurrent war afflicting Europe.

¹ An earlier version of this paper, entitled 'The United States' Ideas for Europe's political reorganisation and the European response: an opportunity lost?', was presented at the conference 'The Lost Decade. The 1950s in European economy, society and culture' at Cardiff University, 11–13 July 2007.

² The text of the Schuman declaration can be downloaded from the European navigator website: www.ena.lu

If the diagnosis seemed self-evident to the U.S., so did the remedy: only by consigning the dogma of national sovereignty and the illusion of self-sufficiency to the past and adopting the U.S. model for political and economic organisation might Europe put an end to its perpetual cycle of wars and enter into an age of peace and prosperity comparable to that enjoyed by the United States. Given that the United States had been forced to enter into the last two European conflicts – the First and Second World Wars – the Americans believed they had the right to demand that Europe solve the causes of its problems once and for all. According to the U.S. senator and future U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, in 1948:

Twice within the last twenty-five years the United States has become deeply involved in the wars originating between the independent, unconnected sovereignties of Europe. It has been demonstrated that the world has so shrunk that European wars can no longer, as during the last century, be confined to Europe. Therefore, it is not merely of self-interest to Europe, but of vital concern to us, that there be not restored in Europe the conditions which inherently give rise to such wars. From a purely selfish standpoint any American program for peace must include a federated continental Europe.³

Such a reorganisation had to ensure more efficient, as well as more logical management of the continent's economic resources – an indispensable part of post-war recovery. The target was no longer the self-sufficiency of the nation-states, but a prosperous union comparable to that of the United States. The main administrator of the Marshall Plan, Paul Hoffman, did not hesitate to make such a comparison to the heads of Europe in 1949:

The fact that we have in the United States a single market of 150 million consumers has been indispensable to the strength and efficiency of our economy. The creation of a

³ 'The Unification of Western Europe' (4 June 1948), John Foster Dulles Papers Collection, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

permanent freely trading area comprising 270 million consumers in Western Europe would have a multitude of helpful consequences.⁴

Two years later it was General Eisenhower, in his role as Supreme Allied Commander of Europe, who described his vision of Europe to the English Speaking Union in London:

Once united, the farms and factories of France and Belgium, the foundries of Germany, the rich farmlands of Holland and Denmark, the skilled labor of Italy, will produce miracles for the common good. In such unity is a secure future for these peoples. [...] The establishment of a workable European federation would go far to create confidence among people everywhere that Europe was doing its full and vital share in giving this cooperation.⁵

As far the economy was concerned, the response of the European countries could only be positive: achieving economic recovery was a vital prerequisite to political stability. European leaders shared the concerns of their U.S. counterparts about the expansion of communism. They wanted to ensure the proper functioning of the system and to satisfy the needs of their citizens – thus avoiding that they looked at communism as an alternative.

Introducing radical changes in the political and economic structures of Europe in an attempt to achieve this, however, was quite another matter. Although they were ready to make essential constitutional changes to avoid such concentrations of power as had been allowed to accumulate in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, European governments focused all their efforts on overcoming the ravages of war. Thus the words of Hoffman, cited above, were a reminder two years after the launching of the Marshall Plan that the Europeans had taken no steps towards implementing a fundamental part of the plan: that calling for the dissolution of the continent's internal frontiers.

⁴ Text of statement made by Paul G. Hoffman on the European economy, 31 October 1949. Downloaded from the webpage of the Harry S. Truman Library: www.trumanlibrary.org (30 May 2007).

⁵ General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 'Unity of Western Europe: Essential for World Security', 3 July 1951, in R. Ducci, *L'Europa Incompiuta* (Padova: CEDAM, 1970), pp. 201–6.

Meanwhile, Washington was desperately looking for a European country that would adopt its policies. The first candidate was the United Kingdom. As the only European country whose institutions had endured the test of war admirably however, the U.K. had no intention of replacing them with European ones. In a personal message which marks the beginning of the distancing of the United Kingdom from projects towards European unification, the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernest Bevin, communicated to his U.S. colleague, Dean Acheson in 1949:

The principal objective of our policy is to reconcile our position as a world power, as a member of the British Commonwealth, and as a member of the European community. We believe that we can effect this reconciliation but that if we are to do so, we cannot accept obligations in relations to Western Europe which would prevent or restrict the implementation of our responsibilities elsewhere.⁶

Following the British rebuff, only one reasonable option remained: France. Yet Paris saw the situation in much the same way that London did, the main difference being that its international standing was much weaker than Britain's. Whilst travelling around France during the summer of 1949, George F. Kennan, the Director of the Policy Planning Staff of the United States Department of State observed:

[...] the French at that time had only one preoccupation; and this was their anxiety lest there be some form of relationship between the British and ourselves from which they might be excluded. [...]. [...] they were full of suspicion and resentment if any discussion were held to which they were not a party. To them at that time the idea of taking any sort of leadership among continental powers, independently of ourselves and the British, was utterly foreign [...]. In short, the French with whom I spoke were simply incapable of understanding what I was talking about.⁷

And what exactly was it that Kennan was talking about?

⁶ 'Personal Message to the Secretary of State from Mr Bevin, dated 25th October 1949', *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1949, vol. 4, pp. 347–8.

⁷ G.F. Kennan, *Memoirs. 1925–1950* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1967), pp. 454–7.

A continental union, sufficiently detached from Britain to have some chance of absorbing the Germans into something larger than themselves, sufficiently detached from ourselves and the Canadians to be truly continental in character, quite separate from the Atlantic pact, and thus eligible, so to speak, to provide a framework into which the smaller Central and Eastern European Countries could eventually be fitted, as and when suitable possibilities might arise [...]. What was important was to guide the movement toward unification along these lines, so that when finally realized it could provide the institutional foundation for a stable Europe [...]. [...] the driving force behind any movement toward political unification on the continent, and the dominant influence within any federal union that came into being would be naturally and unquestionably, France.⁸

The pressure applied by the likes of Kennan and Hoffman was reinforced by Dean Acheson. The day before Hoffman's speech, Acheson wrote a letter to his French colleague, Robert Schuman, entrusting him with the task of leading the integration of Europe, as well as that of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).⁹ As a result, the French government and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the *Quai d'Orsay* – sought to devise a plan that would both satisfy the wishes of the United States and safeguard the interests of France. They were unable to come up with a convincing strategy. Nonetheless, they were certain of the need to contain the FRG. A note by François Seydoux, the director of the European desk at the *Quai d'Orsay*, sheds considerable light on the ideas held by the Ministry:

Germany will not recover her complete independence; the current system of tutelage will pass directly to another system under which other restrictions will limit her freedom, but these limitations will have to be assumed by all the members [...]. No time will exist during which Germany can be the master of her destiny; she will exit the present frame to enter into another one, easier to bear, firstly because it will be less rigid, secondly because it will

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Letter from Acheson to Schuman (30 October 1949), in *FRUS*, 1949, vol. 3, pp. 621–5.

not be confined to the borders of Germany. Germany will enjoy equality of rights, but this equality will only be applied to limited rights.¹⁰

At the same time the head of the General Commissariat for the Modernisation and Equipment of the French Economy, Jean Monnet, set himself the target of turning France's economy into the continent's leading one. To achieve this, he considered it necessary to transform production in six basic sectors – electricity, cement, agricultural machinery, railroads, coal, and steel – which would act as levers for other parts of the economy.¹¹ Monnet understood that his target could not be met if relations between France and Germany, including the future standing of the FRG, were not transformed. Before the war, Germany had been the continent's leading power, and it had the potential to recover this position once the occupation of its territory and the associated restrictions came to an end. Moreover, with coal and steel the principal industrial sectors at the time, French industry was suffering the effects of a serious structural handicap due to its lack of coking coal – indispensable for the production of steel – within French territory. Having to import coking coal from Germany inevitably meant that French production costs were higher than those of the Germans, and therefore French-produced goods less competitive on the market.

During April and May 1950, Monnet came to the conclusion that the only long-term solution to the structural problem undermining French industry was to prevent the German government from having sole use of its coal resources. The problem was how to go about achieving this without upsetting the United States, which wanted to see an

¹⁰ Note de la Direction d'Europe, Quai d'Orsay, 'L'intégration de l'Allemagne dans l'Europe occidentale', 7 April 1950, Europe 1944–1960, Généralités, vol. 133, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter MAE).

¹¹ On the Monnet Plan see Frances M.B. Lynch, *France and the International Economy: from Vichy to the Treaty of Rome* (London: Routledge, 1997).

end to the occupation of the FRG and its integration – without any form of discrimination – in Europe.

Monnet recognised that the only way was to shift the capacity for decision-making to a supra-national body entrusted with overseeing all countries' claims. In this case, operating outside the national framework would serve France's interests rather than working to her detriment. Presented as such, it was easy to convince the French government to sidestep the nation-state. In a memorandum sent by Monnet to Robert Schuman on 3 May 1950, six days before the historic declaration, no mention was made of leading a movement for the federalisation of the continent; Monnet's sole concern was to guarantee the future competitiveness of the French coal and steel industry.¹²

However, even if no deadline was set for its completion and no road-map established, the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 presented a plan to the public for the progressive creation of a European federation in which the pooling of the continent's coal and steel resources was to be just the first step. As such, a plan to settle a specific problem faced by French industry was introduced in a more generous light, thereby allowing the French government to win the support of the United States. Despite being one of the main victims of German militarism during the preceding 70 years, France was offering to promote the integration of her neighbour within the new Europe heralded by the Schuman Plan. The initiative was accepted, and the first European community was born, comprising France, the FRG, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, and the Netherlands. The reality, however, was that France had not mapped out any additional plans for implementation after the Schuman Declaration, and it was inevitable that she would be forced to demonstrate the sincerity of her proposal in the end. Only four months later, following North Korea's attack on the south of the

¹² 'Le Mémorandum Monnet du 3 mai 1950', *Politique Étrangère*, 1 (1993), pp. 121–5.

peninsula – seeming confirmation of its worst fears of Soviet plans¹³ – Washington demanded the rearmament of the FRG within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a condition for committing itself to the defence of Western Europe against an eventual Soviet attack. A rearmed FRG was an unacceptable prospect for Paris back then, and besides, France had proposed some sort of exclusive right of control over the evolution of the FRG in the Schuman Plan. Hence, the American plan was seen as an alternative to its own demands, and one that threatened to be more attractive to Germany, as the country would recover its military capacity – which was of much greater political significance than her coal and steel resources – without having to share her sovereignty within a wider federal framework.

France's only option to regain the position secured by the launching of the Schuman Plan was to respond according to its framework by suggesting the creation of a European army under the authority of the European institutions, which would supersede all links between the national armies and member countries. The proposal to create a federal army to serve a federal Europe was set down in the Pleven Plan of 24 October 1950. (It was out of this that the projects for the European Defence Community [1952] and a constitution for Europe [1953] would develop.)¹⁴ The Pleven Plan won the support of the United States, not only because it committed France to the rearmament of Germany, but also because it served to further the process of federalisation initiated five months earlier. France was faced with having to translate her written words into action, a step that she had never actually contemplated taking. Yet how could France now say that she had no intention of creating a European federation or of establishing France as an element within this union? The discredit to Paris would be absolute, and, moreover,

¹³ See document NSC-68 by Paul Nitze, Director of the Policy Planning Staff of the US Department of State in S. Nelson Drew (ed.), *NSC-68 Forging the Strategy of Containment with Analyses by Paul H. Nitze* (Washington: National Defense University, 1994).

¹⁴ The texts of the Pleven Plan, the European Defence Community treaty, and the 1953 project for a European Constitution can be downloaded from the European Navigator website: www.ena.lu

there was a real risk that France would lose control over the future evolution of Germany. In this second point lies the key to understanding French attitudes over the next four years. As long as she could preserve the *status quo*, France would be the master of the destiny of the FRG and every passing day celebrated as a victory. The result was somewhat paradoxical: on the one hand Europe advanced towards a federation with the measures adopted by the conference of the European Defence Community (EDC); on the other, the French government did everything possible to delay the conclusion of the process. The situation was truly Kafkaesque, and nobody in France knew how to put an end to it whilst saving the country's face. By 1953 the path that had been taken in May 1950 was highly contested in private in the corridors of power, but rarely was it discussed in the public arena – official records leave little doubt about France's commitment to the building of a federal Europe as envisaged by the United States. Its commitment was nonexistent: its preoccupation was to find a way of avoiding it.

At the presentation of the project for a European constitution on 9 March 1953, Paul Henri Spaak, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and president of the assembly entrusted with drafting the document, drew a parallel between the situation in Europe and that faced by the United States in 1787:

Other men more than a century and a half ago faced difficulties similar to our own; they confronted problems scarcely different from those that appear today before us, they shared our doubts, but they were daring and they had success. Why should our destiny be any different? If we show the same spirit of adventure and the same courage, there is no valid reason that should prevent us from obtaining the same success. This task concerns only us;

it is we who are responsible for giving old Europe her force, her greatness and her future projection.¹⁵

The French Minister of Foreign Affairs and the first president of this European community, Georges Bidault, responded, 'Greetings to the seekers of adventure.'¹⁶

The same parallel, albeit for different purposes, was drawn by the European Desk of the *Quai d'Orsay* on 26 January 1953, when in a note entitled 'European Politics' it identified the United States' error in believing that France might be interested in the unification of Europe as an end in itself:

[...] we are afraid that our American friends, being inspired by the American precedent of 1787, have an extremely simplistic conception of the uniting of Europe and do not know the gravity of the problems that the policy of the integration of Europe raises for the European states and particularly France, with worldwide responsibilities [...]. If France has taken the initiative in projects aimed at the common management, in certain areas, of the resources and energy of the countries of continental Europe, this in no way means abandoning its position as a world power nor neglecting any responsibilities with regard to the French Union.¹⁷

If this were not clear enough, the text continued: 'The uniting of Europe is not for us a mystical phenomenon, but politics. We are seeking to carry out transfers of sovereignty appropriate to settling those problems for which the solution exceeds the national framework'. In other words, European politics sought no more than to contribute specific European solutions to those questions which could not be tackled within national borders. It was 'with the aim of solving such problems that we have committed ourselves to the creation of functional communities that carry out, in specific areas, the

¹⁵ Daniela Preda, *Sulla Soglia dell'Unione* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1994), pp. 334–5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ 'Politique Européenne', Direction Générale des Affaires Politiques, Europe, Direction d'Europe Centrale, 26 January 1953, Papiers Bidault, 457 AP 44, Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), Paris.

merger of European resources.’¹⁸ In this context the political community had an obvious role: ‘the functional communities must not be technocratic but they must be submitted, in the largest possible measure, to procedures of democratic control’, which excludes the possibility ‘of constituting a federal European state’. The author of the note goes on to point out the error of using concepts whose meaning diverges from the true targets being pursued: ‘although they appear in Article 38 of the project that institutes the European Defence Community Treaty, it seems preferable to avoid the words “federation” and “confederacy” since both come from a dangerous conception according to which Europe must be constituted from above by creating a political organisation common to six states’. The targets of Paris were much more specific: ‘Our European policy [...] is designed to solve precise problems: the promotion of European productivity, the implementation of balanced measures for armament and Germany’s contribution to defence’. The balancing act was clear: ‘this policy bears both a condition and a limit: the maintenance of France’s position in the world and the constant and effective support of the American government.’¹⁹

Bidault, who understood that there was no going back for his country, summed up the French position perfectly: ‘If, after having convinced the Americans and General Eisenhower, who was not initially a supporter, of the good sense of building a European army, we now reject such an idea, we risk never being taken seriously again.’ Thus the French found themselves in an impossible situation, in which, ‘it is necessary to construct Europe but, simultaneously, France must be present in the world’, since ‘France, the United Kingdom and the United States must govern the western world.’²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See ‘Compte rendu de la réunion tenue le mercredi 11 février à 20’30h chez M. Bidault sur l’organisation politique de l’Europe’, 11 February 1953, Papiers Bidault, 457 AP 38, AN, Paris.

Due to the perennial instability of the governments of the Fourth Republic, by the early summer of 1954 France was immersed in a deep crisis, which the military disaster at Dien Bien Phu in French Indochina only aggravated.²¹ The atmosphere allowed for the appointment in June of a Prime Minister with no links to the European project, which was in fact a prerequisite to finding a way out of the impasse. The politician in question was Pierre Mendès France. Mendès France recognised that finding a solution meant recognising France's real intentions and reorienting the project in a direction with which all the leading players were happy. He first tried to alter the terms of the EDC, which was still pending ratification in France. He put forward a protocol of application whose primary goals were stripping the commissariat – the main supranational organ of the EDC – of any real political power, reaffirming its purely technical nature, and submitting it to the right of veto of the nation-states for eight years, whilst denying it the possibility of recourse to the European court of justice for the same period. Mendès France also argued for the right of each member country to leave the Community should U.S. and British troops be withdrawn from the continent or Germany reunified. Moreover, he repealed Article 38 of the Treaty of the EDC, which envisaged a federal or confederal Europe based on the division of powers, with a representative bicameral system. France's stance represented quite a snub to the other five associate members, whose parliaments, with the exception of Italy's, had already ratified the treaty. It also marked a clear rejection of the position the country had adopted during the preceding four years in order to secure U.S. support.

It was the United Kingdom which gained the most from the turn of events, evaluating the actions taken by Mendès France as follows: 'Her Majesty's Government recognizes that the protocol will be a severe disappointment to many protagonists of

²¹ On the Dien Bien Phu disaster and its consequences see for example Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud, and Mark Rubin (eds), *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1990).

closer European Union and will raise serious problems for those governments which have already ratified the EDC treaty'; but it 'seems to be based on a realistic assessment of the limits to the abandonment of national sovereignty.'²² It was the United Kingdom that agreed secretly to help Mendès France extricate his country from the situation at a meeting in Chartwell attended by Churchill, Eden, and the French Prime Minister, albeit only after the French parliament had vetoed the project of the EDC.²³ Amongst U.S. representatives the disappointment was enormous. The response of Bedell Smith, Undersecretary of State of the United States, was typical. He pointed out that 'the American leaders had seen the EDC as constituting not only a way of rearming Germany with the strongest of guarantees, but as a vital step towards the federation of Europe and they regret the regression that the protocol marks with regard to this latter goal'.²⁴

Assured of British support, Mendès France managed to put an end to the EDC and the federal principles endorsed four years earlier with a procedural vote in the National Assembly in Paris on 30 August 1954. In a speech the previous day referring to Article 38 of the Treaty, he made it clear that, 'it is very important that we save the future for ourselves and that we do not unite, politically, in a definitive way with the European community with the exception, perhaps, of the principle of a democratic assembly'. He added that it was important to calm the public, so as 'not to give them the impression that we are heading towards an unknown political formation [...]'. The conclusion was clear: 'we are faithful to the alliance that provides our security [NATO] and our conception of the alliance is that of a cordial cooperation between associates

²² 'Démarche britannique au sujet du Protocole d'application du Traité de C.E.D. 17 August 1954', Europe 1944–60, Généralités, vol. 76, MAE Paris.

²³ Conversations at Chartwell with Monsieur Mendès France on 23 August 1954. PREM 11/672; U.K. Cabinet meeting in CAB 128/27, CC (54) 57th, 27 August 1954 in Public Record Office, Kew Gardens; Pierre Mendès France, *Choisir. Conversations avec Jean Bothorel* (Paris: Stock, 1974), pp. 75–6.

²⁴ Bedell Smith, 16 August 1954, Telegram from Henri Bonnet, French ambassador in the United States to Pierre Mendès France, DPMF C.E.D. 2 (Bruxelles), Fondation Pierre Mendès France, Paris.

with equal rights who debate their common interests together, while each party remains the judge of its essential and vital interests.’²⁵

An epoch was drawing to a close. Despite its brevity, the four-year period was one of intense politicking: it is fundamental to an understanding the why’s and wherefore’s of the integration of Western Europe. In his autobiography *Man Without a Face*, Markus Wolf, chief of the East German foreign intelligence service, alludes to the battle in which he participated, affirming that the EDC, ‘was finally blocked by the nationalism of the French rather than anything our intelligence service did to discredit the project.’²⁶ An opportunity to convert Western Europe into a federation never really existed, because neither the French government, nor indeed the other European governments, wanted to go beyond the empty promises designed to obtain the backing of the United States.

The re-construction of Europe started in 1957 with the signing of the Treaty of Rome.²⁷ It sought to establish a common market among its members, but whereas the Schuman Declaration had spoken in terms of a European federation, the treaty was designed to work towards ‘ever closer union’.²⁸ Never again have the terms ‘federal’ or ‘confederal’ been used in an official text to define the final target of the European project. Indeed, the writers of the stillborn European constitution of 2004 contented themselves with establishing in Article 3.1 on the Union Objectives that, ‘the Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples’. Similarly, Tony Blair, then British Prime Minister, asserted in the foreword of ‘The White Paper on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe’ that, ‘the treaty also makes it plain that

²⁵ Pierre Mendès France, *Gouverner c’est choisir (1954–1955)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp. 258–91.

²⁶ Markus Wolf, *Man Without a Face. The Autobiography of Communism’s Greatest Spymaster* (New York: Public Affairs, 1997), p. 54.

²⁷ The text of the Treaty of Rome can be downloaded from the European navigator website: www.ena.lu

²⁸ *Ibid.*

the European Union is not and will not be a federal superstate'.²⁹ The Reform Treaty agreed on at the EU informal summit in Lisbon on 18–19 October 2007 has not modified this point.³⁰

²⁹ White Paper on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs By Command of Her Majesty, September 2004, Cm 6309, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2004; The European Convention, The Secretariat: Draft of Articles 1 to 16 of the Constitutional Treaty, Brussels, 6 February 2003, CONV 528/03.

³⁰ On the Reform Treaty see the dossier in EurActiv.com: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/eu-reform-treaty/article-163412> (28 October 2007)

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Victor Gavín is Lecturer in Contemporary History at the University of Barcelona.